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News Release

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N.B. Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Commission 1998-99 annual report (00/01/31)

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FREDERICTON (CNB) -- The 1998-99 annual report of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission was released today by Labour Minister Norman McFarlane, the minister responsible for the commission.

"In 1998-99, a significant number of complaints alleged employment discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual harassment, age, mental disability or physical disability," commission chair Constantine Passaris said. "Our records also show that an increased number of organisations and employers sought the Commission's assistance in the development of their human rights policies.

"In keeping with our commitment to be innovative and proactive, the commission undertook several new initiatives that illustrate our efforts to build partnerships with other organizations, to promote women's rights and to empower young people in the protection and promotion of human rights," Passaris said.

"For example, we launched an essay contest to celebrate the life and contributions of the late Senator Muriel McQueen Fergusson, who had a distinguished career of public service and was an ardent promoter of women's rights. In addition, we held an international contest in partnership with Fundy Communications to develop Web-based projects to promote respect for diversity and an understanding of human rights and responsibilities. I also delivered opening remarks at a round table in Grand Falls that was one of the policy forums leading up to the 8th Francophonie Summit, which was held in Moncton in September 1999."

In the Commission's annual report, director Janet Cullinan noted the commission had processed a total of 536 formal and informal complaints in 1998-99. Formal complaints are investigated by the commission, while informal complaints are cases where complainants opt to bypass the investigation phase and go directly into the conciliation phase. The majority of the complaints received were employment related, nearly half of them dealing with sexual discrimination or sexual harassment.

Cullinan said the issue that caused the most public controversy during the year arose out of complaints filed against then Fredericton Mayor Brad Woodside for his refusal to proclaim Gay Pride Weekend. A human rights board of inquiry upheld the complaints in September 1998 and ordered the mayor to issue a proclamation. After reading it inaudibly at the Oct. 12, 1998 city council meeting, Woodside read it out loud at the following meeting.

Karen Taylor, associate director for Education and Development, reported that her branch had been

nominated for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation's Excellence in Race Relations Award. Among the commission's new publications was a 109-page retrospective on the commission's first 30 years, an information kit and poster on the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as a study guide for the Commission's Vision for Equality video series. Taylor noted the commission's Web site had received an estimated 28,000 visits during the year.

"In this historic millennium year, I invite all New Brunswickers to join with us at the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission in a new partnership to protect and promote human rights in our province," Passaris said. "Working together, we can become a powerful force capable of tearing down the walls of discrimination and opening the doors to equality, as we give tangible expression to our commitment to a social contract that promotes a society of generous heart and open mind."

The New Brunswick Human Rights Commission administers the provincial Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination and harassment based on religion, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, mental and physical disability, race, colour, national origin, place of origin and ancestry. The act applies to all employers, public services and housing, except those that fall under federal jurisdiction.

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EDITORS NOTE -- Copies of the 1998-99 annual report of the Human Rights Commission are available from Francis Young at 506-453-2308. For more information about the Human Rights Commission and the Human Rights Act, see http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/index.htm. MEDIA CONTACT: Francis Young, Human Rights Officer, New Brunswick Human Rights Commission Chairman, 506-453-2301.

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